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# Women Returning to Employment, Education and Training in Ireland: An Analysis of Transitions*

HELEN RUSSELL and PHILIP J. O'CONNELL
*The Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin*

*Abstract:* Recent improvements in the Irish labour market have led to a substantial increase in the labour force participation rate of women in Ireland. Part of this increase has been fuelled by women moving from the home into paid employment. Much of the existing research on labour market activity among Irish women has focused on cross-sectional analyses of the stock of labour market participants. In this paper we aim to address some of the gaps in the literature by investigating the transition from home to work, and from home to education, training and employment schemes among women in Ireland during the period 1994 to 1999. We adopt a dynamic approach by drawing on the nationally representative longitudinal data in the Living in Ireland Survey. This allows us to provide, for the first time, a representative profile of returners, and to formally model the transition process in terms of supply and demand factors. The analysis also investigates the factors associated with the return to part-versus full-time work.

Our analysis reveals that about one-quarter of those engaged full-time in home duties in 1994 had made a transition to paid work within the six-year period 1994-1999. The study identifies a number of key factors that influence the transition from home to work or education, training and employment schemes, including, on the supply side, age, education, previous work experience, time out of the labour force, and the presence of young children in the household, and on the demand side, macro-economic conditions and urban versus rural residence.

## I INTRODUCTION

Recent improvements in the Irish labour market have led to a substantial increase in the number of Irish women in employment. Women moving from the home to employment have fuelled at least part of this increase. The labour shortages resulting from this economic growth have prompted

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employers and politicians to look at policies to attract more women back into the labour force. However, the issue of access to employment, education and training opportunities for women who have been working in the home is also of concern from a gender equality perspective. This approach focuses on the barriers women face in trying to make a transition into the labour market or education, and the supports needed to facilitate access. This focus avoids women in the home being seen merely as a 'reserve army of labour' to meet fluctuating demands.

Internationally, there is a growing body of research on women's transitions out of and back into the labour force (e.g. Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001; Jonsson and Mills, 2001a; Joshi and Hinde 1993; Macran *et al*., 1996). In Ireland, there has been considerable interest in women's labour force participation (Callan and Farrell, 1991; Doris, 1998; Walsh, 1993). However, to date, there is a relatively small body of research on the characteristics and experiences of women trying to return to the labour market or to education/training in Ireland. For example, little is known about who amongst the population of women in the home are most likely to move into employment or education, nor on the timing of this transition. Research elsewhere in Europe has found that re-entry to the workforce and length of leave is strongly related to women's human capital in the form of education and accumulated work experience (Macran *et al*., 1996; Jonsson and Mills, 2001a; Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001) and family–cycle characteristics, such as age and number of children, and age of mother at birth (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001). A number of studies have also demonstrated the role of demand side factors such as regional labour demand (Joshi and Hinde, 1993; Barnardi, 2001). Family policies are also found to be significant in structuring the timing of women's returns to the labour market (Jonsson and Mills, 2001a; Saurel-Cubizolles *et al*., 1999).

In Ireland, there is some evidence on the factors that make the transition back to the labour market more difficult. Mulvey's (1995) study of the transition to paid work in the Clondalkin area of Dublin found that the key barriers to work were lack of suitable childcare, a lack of confidence and skills, lack of information and advice, and exclusion from State employment/training schemes because of live register requirements.

A report by the Employment Equality Agency (Cousins, 1996) addressed the more specific issue of women returners' access to training and employment schemes. It focused on the exclusion of women returners from official definitions of unemployment and hence their exclusion from training or employment programmes with live register requirements. Cousins concluded that the lack of clear, publicised eligibility criteria surrounding education, training and employment schemes led to widespread confusion. These issues were taken up again in *The Report of the Working Group on Women's Access to*

*Labour Market Opportunities* (DSCFA, 2000). The report made a range of recommendations about extending programme access to returners, who they define as 'returners/entrants to the labour force who have been primarily engaged in domestic and caring duties in the home, who are available for and genuinely seeking work'. The working group also highlighted the need for flexible provision of training and education and the need for adequate childcare provision.

A recent qualitative study on lone parents (Russell and Corcoran, 2000) found that this group experienced great difficulty finding work or training opportunities that were compatible with their caring responsibilities or that provided sufficient income to meet childcare costs and compensate for loss of benefits. The loss of secondary social welfare payments such as rent supplement also prevented lone parents from taking up employment (ibid. pp. 21-2). Lone parents' participation in training or employment schemes was restricted because few courses were offered on a part-time basis or provided childcare, and those aged under 21 found themselves excluded from VTOS educational programmes because of age restrictions (ibid p. 23). Only Community Employment (CE) schemes appeared to offer sufficient flexibility. However, few had found jobs through CE schemes and they were often viewed as self-development programmes rather than as a direct route into the paid work force.

A number of studies have addressed the effectiveness of different types of training among returners. Research by O'Connell and McGinnity (1997) has shown that returners are concentrated in the least effective active labour market programmes. However, while research on programme effectiveness shows that CE does little to enhance the employment prospects of men, there is evidence that it can improve women's subsequent employment chances (Denny, Harmon and O'Connell, 2000).

Research by Lyons (2000) that explores the training decision of women returners, found that women who had completed specific skills training programmes or employment subsidy programmes (e.g. Back to Work Allowance) were more likely to enter employment than those who participated in direct employment schemes (e.g. CE). There was no difference in the probability of entering employment between participants in general training and participants in direct employment schemes.

The Irish literature to date has provided little evidence on the type of jobs the returners enter or the conditions they face when they return to work. However, research in the UK has shown that returners often experience downward mobility, reduced earnings and fewer promotion opportunities when they re-enter the job market (Joshi and Hinde, 1993; McRae, 1993). In Sweden however, where parental leave schemes are extensive, women

returners are better protected from downward mobility (Jonsson and M~ills, 2001b). In Ireland, Barrett *et al*'*s*. (2000) study of male-female pay showed that there is a strong pay penalty attached to years spent outside the labour market. The type of jobs entered by Irish returners and level of pay received is addressed elsewhere by the authors (Russell *et al*., 2002).

In this paper we aim to address some of the gaps in the literature by investigating the transition from home to employment and from home to education/training/employment schemes among Irish women over the period 1994 to 1999. This research provides for the first time a formal model of the transition process, thereby identifying significant push and pull factors. The dynamic approach is important since returning is a process rather than a stable state, and this approach differentiates the study from cross-sectional analyses of female labour market participation. The main study from which the present paper is drawn also contains complementary results from qualitative interviews with women in the home, trainees, service providers and employers (Russell *et al*., 2002). Here we focus on the quantitative analysis but refer readers to these additional findings. Before introducing the data and results we outline a number of key conceptual and definitional issues.

## II DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

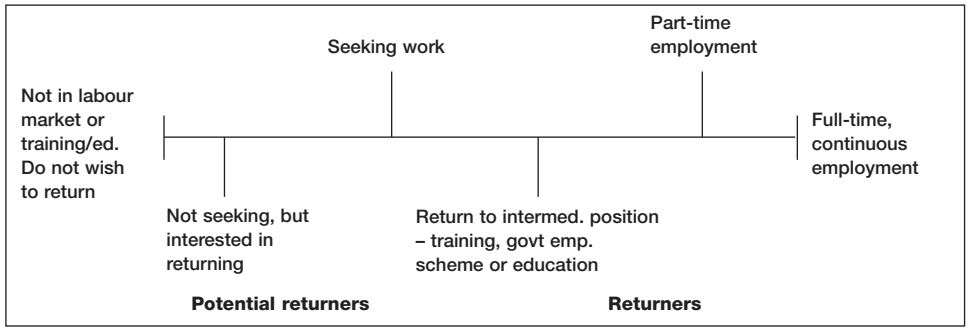
In this study we define returners as women who have spent a period of time outside the labour market, in full-time caring or home duties, who (re)enter employment, education, training or employment schemes. This definition includes women who have never had a paid job before, but went straight from education to rearing their family. So some of the women will be entering the labour market for the first time rather than 'returning'. The defining factor is spending time full-time in the home before entering the labour market or education/training. By including education as a 'return' we are moving away from standard definitions that define education and training as non-participation.

Conventional labour market concepts and definitions are often inadequate in capturing the status of women returners. Transitions out of and back into the labour market around child-rearing, greater involvement in part-time employment, and ongoing responsibilities for domestic and caring work when in paid employment can all blur the boundaries between being outside the labour market (economic inactivity), employment and unemployment. Take, for example, the definition of unemployment. Women in the home who are actively seeking and available for employment meet the ILO definition of

unemployment, however, few will appear on the unemployment register because they do not qualify for unemployment benefits (DFSCA, 2000).[2] However, this ambiguity is not confined to official definitions: women in this position will often define themselves as housewives rather than unemployed (Russell, 1999). Similarly, women who do a few hours paid work every week but spend the majority of their time in caring and domestic work will not necessarily define themselves as employed.

Due to these ambiguities it is more useful to conceive of women's labour market status as a continuum rather than a series of distinct statuses with rigid boundaries. At one end are women who are completely outside the labour market and with no desire to return and at the other are women in full-time, continuous employment. This continuum is represented in Figure 1. On the left side are the potential returners, i.e. women in home duties who are not involved in paid work, education or training, and on the right side are women who have taken a step into a range of activities. As labour market attachment tends to change over the life cycle, women's position along this continuum is not fixed over time.

Figure 1: *Continuum of Women's Involvement in the Labour Market*




## III DATA

The analysis draws on six waves of the Living in Ireland Panel Surveys carried out between 1994 and 1999.[3] The survey was initiated in 1994 when 4,048 households were sampled and 9904 individuals within these households were interviewed. In each subsequent year an attempt is made to re-interview

[2] Even signing-on for credits is not an option for many women in home duties due to an absence from insurable employment of more than two years. In the Living in Ireland survey it was found that only 6.3 per cent of women in home duties in 1994 were on the unemployment register and 6.7 per cent in 1998 (Russell *et al*., 2002).

[3] These surveys encompass the Irish element of the European Community Household Panel (ECHP).

all panel members. Household moves, deaths and refusal to participate all lead to attrition in the sample over time. However, where possible, households that have moved are traced, respondents who set up new households are followed, and any new adult household members are interviewed. Although there is a significant attrition in overall numbers, detailed analyses of non-responding individuals and households using information from previous waves shows that this was not biased by factors such as age, sex, education, household size, economic status of head of household (Layte *et al*., 2001, Appendix 1).[4] Details on the sample size and response rates for each year are included in Appendix Table A.1.

The Living in Ireland surveys collect detailed information on respondents' employment situation, family status, job search behaviour, income, as well as many other socio-demographic variables. The major advantage of this data source for a study of women returners is the ability to follow women over time and trace changes in their employment status. In our transition analyses we identify women who are in home duties in one year (*t*) and examine their employment status when they are re-interviewed the following year (*t+1*). Therefore, we look at transitions in five pairs of years: 1994 to 1995; 1995 to 1996; 1996 to 1997; 1997 to 1998; and 1998 to 1999.

## IV IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL RETURNERS FROM THE LIVING IN IRELAND SURVEYS

Using the general framework outlined above, we first selected those who in any of the surveys between 1994 and 1998 defined their main activity as 'home duties', excluding those who were engaged in any paid work. We then traced the movements of these women between the annual surveys. We applied an age cut-off of 65 years because including women over this age would have an unduly negative effect on the transition rates.

Among those in home duties there will be women who are more or less interested in returning to the labour market. The primary information that the Living in Ireland survey (LII) contains on the labour market attachment of women in home duties is whether or not they are seeking employment.

[4] There is an association between non-response and changing address, which particularly affects young single households. This does not apply to women in home duties the great majority of whom have families and whose average age is over 40 years (Russell *et al*., 2002). Weights have been applied to correct for any biases including those caused by attrition. Our models are based on unweighted data but include many of the variables which would be corrected by the weight. The models also include anyone who was present in at least two consecutive surveys (rather than all six), which reduces the effect of attrition.

Respondents whose main activity was not work were asked "Are you at present seeking work (either full-time or part-time) whether as an employee or self-employed?" Those seeking work are assumed to be further along the continuum towards employment than those who are not looking for work.

Table 1 contains information on the number of women in home duties in each of the survey waves and the proportion of the group seeking work. There is no linear trend in the proportion seeking work. However, the percentage is particularly low in 1999. This drop in job search in 1999 may arise because improved labour market circumstances mean that those who want employment will have already found jobs. The population figures reflect the fact that the number of women in full-time home duties has been shrinking over time. Figures from the Quarterly National Household Survey and Labour Force Survey show that the proportion of adult women (aged over 15 years) in home duties in Ireland fell from 43.4 per cent in 1994 to 34.8 per cent in 2000 (Russell *et al*., 2002). Nevertheless, they still represent a sizeable group in the population and the figures in Table 1 suggest that in 1998 there were 24,147 women in the home looking for employment.

Table 1: *Job Search Among those in Home Duties (under 65)*

| | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Seeking work | 9.3 | 5.8 | 5.2 | 8.4 | 6.0 | 3.1 |
| Not seeking | 90.7 | 94.2 | 94.8 | 91.6 | 94.0 | 96.9 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N unweighted | 2352 | 1993 | 1707 | 1490 | 1350 | 1145 |
| N pop weight | 472,466 | 448,274 | 419,602 | 423,331 | 402,442 | 360,192 |

*Note:* The percentages in all tables are based on weighted data.

Although we distinguish between seekers and non-seekers at year one we do not expect that only women seeking work will have made a transition by the next interview. First, the discussion on the fluidity of women's labour market status above suggests that women's orientation to work may well change between the two interviews so that some of those who were not seeking will start to look for a job, while others will stop. Second, studies in the UK have found that women returners are often reluctant to declare that they are searching for work, but may nevertheless grasp employment opportunities when they are presented to them, so that there appears to be a high rate of job attainment without search (Chaney 1981; Russell, 1996).

## V DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF TRANSITIONS OVER TIME

For those in home duties at each survey (*t*) we identify four different destination states in the following year (*t+1*), these are: at work, in education/training, non-employed seeking work, non-employed not seeking. The 'non-employed' category includes those women who in *t+1* define themselves as in home duties, unemployed or retired and are not doing any paid work.

The year on year transition matrices for women in home duties into these four destinations are reported in Tables 2 to 4. The proportion of women in home duties moving into work each year remained relatively stable at about 7 per cent from 1994 to 1997 but then increased to almost 12 per cent in 1998-1999, an increase which probably reflects the effects of labour shortages at the end of the 1990s. Throughout the period, those seeking work in year one (*t*) have a much higher rate of employment at *t+1* than women who were not actively looking for work.

The proportion moving into what might be termed intermediate positions, i.e. training, education or government employment schemes has hovered around 2 per cent for the whole time period. It is interesting to note that a significant proportion of those in home duties who are searching in one year have suspended this search by the following interview, for example half of the women seeking work in wave 1 had stopped searching in wave 2. In other years the percentage quitting job search, dropped to between 30 and 40 per cent. This may be a response to a lack of success in finding work or may reflect a change in orientation to the labour market.

Table 2: *Transition Matrix for those in Home Duties, 1994-95 and 1995-96*

| *Status in (t+1)* | *In Home Duties 1994 (t)* | | | *In Home Duties 1995 (t)* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Seeking* | *Not Seeking* | *All* | *Seeking* | *Not Seeking* | *All* |
| Employed/Self Emp | 18.0 | 5.4 | 6.5 | 13.5 | 6.1 | 6.7 |
| Training/ Emp Scheme/ Ed. | 7.5 | 1.8 | 2.3 | 15.6 | 2.4 | 3.5 |
| Non-employed, seeking | 22.6 | 3.1 | 4.8 | 31.3 | 2.4 | 4.6 |
| Non-employed, not seeking | 51.9 | 89.8 | 86.4 | 39.6 | 89.1 | 85.2 |
| | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *N Unweighted* | *114* | *1395* | *1509* | *73* | *1182* | *1255* |
| Chi-square | | P < .001 | | | | |

Table 3: *Transition Matrix for those in Home Duties, 1996-97 and 1997-98*

| *Status in (t+1)* | *In Home Duties 1996 (t)* | | | *In Home Duties 1997 (t)* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Seeking* | *Not Seeking* | *All* | *Seeking* | *Not Seeking* | *All* |
| Employed/ Self Emp | 23.6 | 5.9 | 6.7 | 23.4 | 5.6 | 7.0 |
| Training/ Emp Scheme/ Ed. | 3.6 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 3.9 | 2.4 | 2.5 |
| Non-employed, seeking | 40.0 | 6.1 | 7.8 | 36.4 | 2.5 | 5.2 |
| Non-employed, not seeking | 32.7 | 86.2 | 83.6 | 36.4 | 89.5 | 85.3 |
| | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *N Unweighted* | *54* | *1074* | *1128* | *58* | *880* | *938* |
| Chi-square | | P < .001 | | | P < .001 | |

*Table 4: Transition Matrix for those in Home Duties, 1998-1999*

| *Status in 1999 (t+1)* | *In Home Duties 1998 (t)* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Seeking* | *Not Seeking* | *All* |
| Employed/ Self Emp | 19.4 | 11.4 | 11.8 |
| Training/ Emp. Scheme/ Ed. | 11.1 | 2.1 | 2.6 |
| Non-employed, seeking | 25.0 | 1.6 | 2.7 |
| Non-employed, not seek | 44.4 | 84.9 | 82.9 |
| | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *N Unweighted* | *35* | *736* | *771* |
| Chi -square | | P < .001 | |

*Long-term Transition Rates*

Tables 2 to 4 show the annual transition rates between home duties and employment, however, because we have panel data for six years it is also possible to examine transition rates over a longer time period. In Table 5 we outline the proportion of women in home duties in 1994 who made the transition to work at any point up to 1999 (with the caveat that we do not observe cases in which a job is entered and left again in between annual surveys). When we look at transitions over the longer period, we see that almost a quarter (24 per cent) of those in home duties in 1994 made a transition into unsupported employment at some time over the six year observation period. We also present the transition rates for the subset of the women who responded to all six surveys: 27 per cent of this group are found to have made a transition from home to employment by 1999. These results emphasise the fluidity of women's employment status since over a quarter of

women in home duties in wave one had experienced at least one spell of employment over a six year period.

Table 5: *Percentage of Women in Home Duties in 1994 Who Made Transition to Employment Between 1994 and 1999*

| | In any 2 surveys % | In all 6 surveys[1] % |
|---|---|---|
| No transition to work | 76.5 | 72.9 |
| Yes, transition from home to work | 23.5 | 27.1 |
| | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *Base N* | *1743* | *950* |

[1] Weighted by six wave longitudinal weight.

*Factors Influencing Returns to Work, Training/Education/Employment Schemes*

Studies of female labour market participation have found that a wide range of supply side factors influence participation, including personal characteristics, such as age and educational attainment, household factors, including partner's employment and children's ages, as well as labour market related variables, including previous work experience and the incentive structure shaped by the social welfare system. The activities of those seeking to hire labour also influence participation: the size and nature of demand in the economy, as well as the organisation of work, including the provision of part-time and other forms of flexible working arrangements, are all likely to affect the numbers participating in the labour force.

Studies of female labour market participation in Ireland are generally based on cross-sectional analyses of who is in or out of the labour market at a particular point in time. They are essentially models of the stock rather than of the flow, and participation equations assume transition processes into and out of non-employment rather than modelling them directly. The advantage of the analysis outlined here is that we can assess directly the factors associated with moving back into the labour market or education. Our analysis concentrates on the supply side factors outlined above, but the level of demand is incorporated in the calendar year and in the geographical location variables. It is beyond the scope of the current paper to examine transitions from employment into home duties, although these flows influence the composition of our sample in that only those women who have spent time in home duties can be included in the analysis, so factors that influence exits from the labour market will shape the characteristics of those in home duties.

## VI TRANSITION MODELS

The home to work/education/training transitions are analysed using discrete-time transition models. The approach is to model the conditional probability of moving out of home duties given that exit has not already occurred and depending on the values of selected covariates. Discrete time models divide respondents' work histories into independent observations for each unit of time (in this analysis each year). In each year we record the response variable (employment status) and the values of time-constant variables such as sex and time-varying covariates such as age of youngest child. The duration of spell until exit is noted in the *time out of the labour market* variable. For those with previous work experience this measures the time that has elapsed since the last job finished. For those with no previous work experience 'time out' is equal to the total years spent in home duties.

In our sample 1,850 women were in home duties in at least one of the surveys, and were observed in at least two consecutive waves of the survey between 1994 and 1999.[5] This produced 5,886 person-years to analyse. If an individual experiences more than one transition all transitions are included in the model.

The options open to women engaged in home duties are not confined to a choice between paid work and home. As we can see from the transition matrices reported above, they can also participate in education, training or employment schemes,[6] an option which may be an initial step in the return to the labour force in some cases. Given the possibility that education or training can serve as an intermediate stage in the move from home duties into the labour force, it is useful to develop a statistical model of the alternative destinations understood in terms of competing risks or outcomes and to analyse the factors associated with transitions to each destination. Our first model consists of a multinomial logit, which simultaneously estimates the probability of entering employment or entering education/training/employment schemes versus remaining in home duties. Our second model is a multinomial logit of the probability of entering part- versus full-time employment versus remaining in home duties.

[5] We re-ran the models restricting the sample to those who were present in all six waves, the results were broadly similar, however, we decided to maximise the number of transitions included in the model.

[6] Employment schemes such as CE, Back to Work Allowance, etc. are confined to those who are registered unemployed, qualified adults and various categories of benefit recipients and are therefore not open to many returners. Similarly, the VTOS education programme is limited to similar categories.

The multinomial logit model, as described in Greene (2003) is:

$$\text{Prob}(Y_i = j) = \frac{e^{\beta_j' x_i}}{\sum_{k=0}^{2} e^{\beta_j' x_i}}, \; j = 0, 1, 2$$

The estimated equations provide a set of probabilities for the J + 1 choices for a decision maker with characteristics $x_i$. In both models there are three choices: paid employment or participation in education or training versus home duties (Table 6); and full- or part-time work versus home duties (Table 8). In both models the regressors include age, education, labour market experience etc.

An important issue in the use of multinomial logit models is the assumption of independence from irrelevant alternatives (IIA). The IIA property holds that the ratio of the choice probabilities from any two alternative response categories is not influenced systematically by any other alternatives. This assumption is particularly troublesome if two or more alternatives are very similar (Verbeek, 2000). In the present analyses, however, the response categories, home duties, education or training versus paid employment (Table 6), and home duties versus part- or full-time work (Table 8), are sufficiently discreet that they are unlikely to violate the IIA assumption. While the distinction between part- and full-time work might appear slight, our qualitative research indicates that for this particular group of labour market entrants the distinction is an important one (Russell *et al*., 2002). Women returning to the labour market from home duties make choices between part- versus full-time work in relation to competing demands in the domestic sphere, particularly childcare. Indeed many women making the transition from home to work would prefer to work part-time but often accept full-time employment because they are unable to find part-time work. This suggests that the distinction between full and part-time work is a discreet one, and also, of course, that an ordered-response approach to modelling the transitions would not be appropriate in this instance.

The estimated models assess the influence of a range of factors which may influence transitions from home duties. In addition to a dummy variable measuring whether the woman was actively seeking work at time *t*, these include: personal characteristics such as age and education; family characteristics, such as marital status and employment status of partner, number of children and age of youngest child; personal labour market history, including work experience and the number of years out of the labour market; social welfare claimant status; and factors relating to labour market demand, including urban/rural residence and year of re-entry. In the discrete time

models the unit of analysis becomes the year rather than the individual.[7] Descriptive statistics for the full set of variables used in the analyses are reported in Appendix Table A2.

Table 6 presents the results of the multinomial logit analysis of the probability of moving from home duties in any given year to either (1) paid work, or (2) education, training or state-sponsored temporary employment scheme, versus remaining in home duties, in any subsequent year, from 1994 to 1999.

Women aged more than 45 years were less likely to make a transition from home duties to paid work than women aged less than 25 years, the reference category, but age had no impact on the transition to education, training or employment schemes. Education had differential effects. Exponentiating the estimated coefficient in respect of women with tertiary education yields an odds ratio of 2.11, indicating that women at this level of education were more than twice as likely as those with no qualifications, the reference category, to enter employment rather than remain in home duties. However, those with a Leaving Certificate level of education were more likely to enter temporary employment schemes, education or training. This suggests that women with low levels of education face barriers to access to labour market programmes. However, those with third level education were no more likely than those with no qualifications to enter education, training or employment schemes. This may reflect preferences among women with higher educational attainment, but may also be due to a shortage of appropriate labour market interventions.

Participation in education or training in the previous year had no effect on the probability of entry to paid work, but it did have a positive effect on the transition to education, training or employment. This latter effect, of recent education or training, should be interpreted with caution, since in some cases the participation in education in the previous year may have continued through the subsequent year, so that this effect may be due to overlapping periods of education or training over two waves of the panel survey, in some cases.

Turning to family characteristics we found that marital status did not influence the probability of moving to either employment or training/education/employment schemes. We included partner's employment status as an indicator of alternative sources of income in the family but this was found to be insignificant for work transitions.[8] Having an employed partner has a

[7] The models take account of the multiple (non-independent) observations for individuals by identifying these as 'clusters' and applying robust standard errors (see Greene, 2003).

[8] We re-specified this variable to test the effect of having an unemployed partner to detect possible benefit disincentive effects but this was also insignificant. Additionally, we tested the impact of partner's weekly earnings, using data for 1998/99 data and found this too was insignificant.

Table 6: *Multinomial Logit Regression of Transition to Paid Work or Education / Training / Employment Scheme Versus Remaining in Home Duties*

| | | *Employment* | | *Education / Training / Employment Scheme* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Coefficient* | *Robust S.E.* | *Coefficient* | *Robust S.E* |
| Intercept | | –1.51*** | .414 | –3.67*** | .908 |
| Age < 25 | *Ref.* | | | | |
| Age 25-34 | | –0.20 | .302 | –0.45 | .508 |
| Age 35-44 | | –0.41 | .320 | 0.32 | .591 |
| Age 45-54 | | –0.94** | .358 | 0.20 | .716 |
| Age 55+ | | –1.76*** | .389 | –1.43 | .858 |
| No Qualification | *Ref.* | | | | |
| Junior Certificate | | 0.23 | .140 | 0.59 | .318 |
| Leaving Certificate | | 0.22 | .148 | 0.72* | .326 |
| Tertiary | | 0.76** | .243 | 0.60 | .617 |
| Educ/Training last 12 mths | | 0.18 | .228 | 1.08** | .405 |
| Married/with partner | *Ref.* | | | | |
| Separated/Divorced/Widowed | | 0.27 | .306 | –0.96 | .838 |
| Never Married | | –0.19 | .412 | –0.11 | .717 |
| Partner working | | 0.00 | .136 | –0.48 | .332 |
| No children under 12 yrs of age | *Ref.* | | | | |
| Youngest child under 5 yrs | | –0.64** | .187 | –0.65 | .392 |
| Youngest child 5-12 yrs | | –0.15 | .161 | –0.32 | .319 |
| Caring for relative or other | | –0.21 | .172 | –0.63 | .420 |
| Ever in paid work | | 0.34 | .200 | 0.03 | .408 |
| Years working (%) | | 0.88** | .337 | 0.73 | .790 |
| Seeking work | | 0.95*** | .173 | 0.91** | .309 |
| < 2 years out of labour market | *Ref.* | | | | |
| 2-5 years out of labour market | | –0.85*** | .180 | –0.49 | .345 |
| 5-10 years out of labour market | | –1.31*** | .198 | –0.66 | .374 |
| 10-15 years out of labour market | | –1.43*** | .212 | –0.87* | .419 |
| 15-20 years out of labour market | | –0.80*** | .199 | –0.86 | .460 |
| >20 years out of labour market | | –1.26*** | .212 | –1.79** | .540 |
| No social welfare benefits | *Ref.* | | | | |
| Unemployment | | 0.05 | .232 | 1.78*** | .350 |
| Sickness/Disability | | –1.45** | .459 | 0.05 | .599 |
| Lone Parent | | –0.06 | .372 | 1.93* | .751 |
| Other | | –0.23 | .255 | –1.29 | 1.042 |
| City resident | | 0.36** | .116 | 0.16 | .235 |
| 1994 | *Ref.* | | | | |
| 1995 | | –0.07 | .158 | 0.07 | .307 |
| 1996 | | 0.40** | .149 | 0.23 | .311 |
| 1997 | | 0.00 | .169 | –0.09 | .351 |
| 1998 | | 0.38* | .163 | –0.34 | .388 |
| N of cases | | 5,886 | | | |
| Log Likelihood | | –1809.7 | | | |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | | .134 | | | |

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

negative coefficient in respect of transitions to education/training, which almost reaches statistical significance, this may reflect eligibility restrictions based on spouses' benefit status. Women with youngest children under the age of 5 were less likely to (re)enter paid work than those without children under 12, but the presence of young children had no impact on the transition to education, training or employment or schemes. The lower probability of moving into employment among those with young children will partly reflect choices, however a significant percentage of women with children under 5 years were looking for work each year. In 1998, 11 per cent of those with young children were seeking work compared to 4 per cent of those without. The proportions in 1994 were 8 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. This suggests that difficulties with childcare may also play a role. Caring for elderly or other dependent relatives did not influence transitions to paid work or training.

The next set of variables relates to labour market behaviour past and present. Women who were seeking work were more likely than those who were not seeking, to be either employed or in an education, training or employment scheme the following year. Years out of the labour market, our time variable, had a negative impact on the probability of a transition to paid work. The size of the coefficient fell among those who had been out of the labour market for 15-20 years (but remained negative). This pattern may be related to child-bearing and rearing, suggesting that the negative effect of time out of the labour market may be offset by some women returning to paid work after completing child-rearing.

The coefficients relating to time out of the labour market were also negative in respect of the transition to education or training, although this effect only became significant among those who had been engaged in home duties for 10-15 years or over 20 years. While having any previous work experience was not a significant determinant of re-entry, years working, expressed as a proportion of total time elapsed since age 10, had a positive impact on the probability of entering employment but not on entering education/training.

The results relating to benefit receipt do not suggest the presence of any general benefit disincentive effect. The only significant negative coefficient related to receipt of sickness or disability related social welfare payments in respect of the transition to employment, and this is more likely to be related to the physical condition associated with such benefits rather than any disincentive effect. Indeed, receipt of unemployment compensation and lone parents' allowance, were found to *increase* the odds of entering education or training in the subsequent year. The positive effects of these two social welfare categories may be due to the targeting of active labour market programmes particularly employment schemes on particular social welfare categories

(recipients of unemployment compensation and Lone Parents Allowances). The transition probabilities of all other claimants were not statistically different from those of non-claimant women.

Finally, the two measures of labour demand had a significant effect on transitions to paid work but not to education/training/employment. Urban location had a positive impact on the transition to employment, which is likely to reflect the greater economic opportunities available to women in urban areas. Transitions from home duties to paid work were more common in 1996 and 1998 compared to the reference year (1994).

*Full-time Versus Part-time Work*

Table 6 reports the results of a simple contrast between entry to paid work or education, training or employment schemes versus remaining in home duties. However, the qualitative element of the research, highlighted that women's returns to employment were frequently contingent upon the availability of part-time hours, which would allow them to combine caring and paid work (Russell *et al*., 2002). Table 7 shows that a substantial majority of women returning to employment enter part-time work. Other research suggests that part-time work is more open than full-time work to access by outsiders to the labour market – including both the unemployed and women returners (O'Connell and Gash, 2003; O'Connell *et al.*, 2003).

Table 7: *Usual Hours of Work Among Women Returners*

| | *1995* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *Mean*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Part-time[2] | 70.4 | 59.5 | 74.0 | 62.3 | 88.7 | 71.0 |
| Full-time | 29.6 | 40.5 | 26.0 | 37.7 | 11.3 | 29.0 |
| | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *N Unweighted* | *107* | *92* | *106* | *70* | *76* | |

[1] Mean of five annual percentage figures, i.e. all years given equal weight.
[2] Part-time = less than 30 hours per week.

We can model the different factors determining entry to full- versus part-time work by estimating a multinomial logistic model of the probability of moving from home duties in any given year to either (1) full-time work, or (2) part-time work, versus remaining in home duties, in any subsequent year, from 1994 to 1999 (see Table 8).

Women aged more than 45 years were less likely to make a transition to full-time work, while only those over 55 years less likely to make a transition to part-time work, than women aged less than 25 years, the reference category.

*Table 8: Multinomial Logit Regression of Transition to Full-time or Part-time Work Versus Remaining in Home Duties*

| | *Full-time* | | *Part-time* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Coefficient* | *Robust SE* | *Coefficient* | *Robust SE* |
| Intercept | –2.26** | .655 | –2.11*** | .515 |
| Age < 25 | | | | |
| Age 25-34 | –0.54 | .458 | –0.15 | .363 |
| Age 35-44 | –0.62 | .481 | –0.46 | .384 |
| Age 45-54 | –1.89** | .626 | –0.76 | .425 |
| Age 55+ | –2.89*** | .705 | –1.57** | .460 |
| No Qualification | | | | |
| Junior Certificate | 0.82* | .317 | 0.13 | .157 |
| Leaving Certificate | 1.34*** | .307 | –0.06 | .172 |
| Tertiary | 1.92*** | .440 | 0.51 | .288 |
| Educ/Training last 12 mths | 0.38 | .360 | 0.08 | .281 |
| Married/with partner | | | | |
| Separated/Divorced/Widowed | –0.02 | .625 | 0.40 | .339 |
| Never Married | –0.40 | .623 | –0.27 | .484 |
| Partner working | –0.09 | .288 | 0.01 | .150 |
| No children under 12 yrs of age | | | | |
| Youngest child under 5 yrs | –0.95** | .309 | –0.56* | .225 |
| Youngest child 5-12 yrs | –0.41 | .293 | –0.05 | .184 |
| Caring for relative or other | –1.30* | .530 | –0.10 | .191 |
| Ever in paid work | –0.24 | .362 | 0.47* | .240 |
| Years working (%) | 1.75* | .696 | 0.78* | .379 |
| Seeking work | 0.67* | .302 | 1.05*** | .192 |
| < 2 years out of labour market | | | | |
| 2-5 years out of labour market | –0.97** | .342 | –0.75*** | .206 |
| 5-10 years out of labour market | –1.13** | .369 | –1.29*** | .229 |
| 10-15 years out of labour market | –0.95* | .387 | –1.48*** | .247 |
| 15-20 years out of labour market | –0.59 | .390 | –0.74** | .230 |
| >20 years out of labour market | –1.02* | .483 | –1.19*** | .241 |
| No social welfare benefits | | | | |
| Unemployment | 0.32 | .395 | –0.04 | .282 |
| Sickness/Disability | –0.01 | .550 | –2.80** | 1.012 |
| Lone Parent | 0.11 | .691 | –0.10 | .415 |
| Other Benefit | 0.19 | .464 | –0.45 | .280 |
| City resident | –0.30 | .230 | 0.52*** | .130 |
| 1994 | | | | |
| 1995 | –0.38 | .286 | 0.06 | .185 |
| 1996 | –0.08 | .276 | 0.54** | .174 |
| 1997 | –0.21 | .296 | 0.12 | .197 |
| 1998 | –0.31 | .332 | 0.50** | .191 |
| N of cases | 5751 | | | |
| Log Likelihood | –1601.6 | | | |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | .120 | | | |

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

So part-time employment appears to offer return opportunities to a wider age range of women.

The influence of education is found to be much stronger for transitions into full-time work than part-time work. In relation to full-time work, any qualification had a positive impact, and the effect was strongest among those with tertiary education. Tertiary education was the only educational level that had a positive effect on the transition to part-time work. Participation in education or training during the previous year had no impact on transitions to either full- or part-time work.

Turning to family characteristics, neither marital status nor the work situation of women's partners impacted on the transition to either part-time or full-time work.[9] The negative impact of having a child under 5 years of age on the transition to paid work noted in the initial model was found for both full- and part-time work transitions but is stronger for full-time work. Caring for an elderly or other relative had a negative effect on the likelihood of entering full-time work, but no impact on part-time work. This result suggests that part-time work is the most feasible option for those with elder care responsibilities, which is consistent with qualitative results on the lack of day-care options for elderly or disabled family members.

We turn next to labour market characteristics. Seeking work increased the probability of making a transition to employment in the following year and the effect was particularly strong with respect to the transition to part-time work. Length of time in home duties had a negative influence on the transition to both full- or part-time work. The apparent decline in this effect among those absent from the labour market for 15 to 20 years is noticeable in both the full-time and part-time equations, but in the full-time model this group have the same transition probability as those who have been in home duties for less than two years. This pattern suggests that the period when children near completion of second level education is a time when full-time transitions become feasible again. It is interesting that years of work experience (as a ratio of age) had a strong positive effect on the probability of entry to full-time work while for part-time transitions, only the distinction between having ever worked before or not is significant. The greater the proportion of time spent employed the more likely women were to enter full-time work, which may be due to greater work commitment or to better wage prospects.

Receipt of social welfare payments had no impact on the transition to full-time work, but receipt of sickness or disability related payments had a negative influence on entry to part-time work.

[9] As in the model of employment or education, training and employment schemes, we tested the impact of partner's weekly earnings, using data for 1998/99 data and found this had no significant impact on the full- or part-time employment model.

Finally, the two measures of labour demand are found to be significant for part-time employment only. Women in home duties were more likely to enter part-time work in 1996 and 1998, compared to the reference year, 1994. The increased transition rates among city dwellers found in the initial model only emerges for part-time work transitions. This is consistent with the results of the qualitative research reported in Russell *et al*. (2002) in which rural women highlighted the lack of locally based part-time opportunities.[10]

## VII CONCLUSIONS

This paper has focused on the situation of women returners in Ireland. It was argued that women can often straddle a number of different labour market categories, for example, working part-time while still defining oneself as a housewife. Therefore, it was suggested that women's attachment to the labour market might better be viewed as a continuum rather than a series of discrete categories. On one side of the continuum we have women who are in full-time home duties who are not doing any paid work. All of this group are potential returners and they are a very sizeable group in the population although their numbers are declining as more and more women participate in the labour market. Within this group there will be women who are more or less interested in returning to the labour market – we use 'seeking work' to distinguish these groups (unfortunately, the data contain no measure of interest in pursuing education options).

The analysis showed that between 6 and 12 per cent of women exited home duties to employment each year. This group included both seekers and non-seekers. When transitions were observed over a longer period, we found that over a quarter of women in home duties in 1994 had made a transition to employment by 1999. These results highlight the mobility of women in home duties and underline the usefulness of adopting a dynamic approach to this issue. These results also suggest that there was a substantial hidden demand for employment among this group of women, which emerged when economic conditions were favourable, a factor which is pertinent to government employment and training policies and for employers' recruitment practices.

Our analysis of transition rates has identified a number of significant barriers to re-entering full and part-time employment among women in home duties. Having pre-school children significantly reduced the probability of making a transition into employment, particularly full-time employment.

[10] Lack of pubic transport was also a barrier for rural dwellers, so it may also be the case that only full-time work sustains the cost of private transport.

While some of this effect will be due to choice, it also reflects the significant barrier posed by the lack of affordable, good quality childcare (especially for those who cannot command a high wage). It is interesting that the effect of having young children (under 5 and 5-12 years) on the transition to education/training/employment schemes was negative but non-significant. This may be due to the considerable variability in provision of part-time training/education options and childcare supports for trainees (Russell *et al*., 2002). The longer-term impact of past caring activities was also evident in the strong negative effect of time out of the labour market on the likelihood of returning to employment and education/training/employment schemes. These findings suggest that improved childcare provision and more flexible training/education opportunities are essential to allow women who wish to return to the workforce or education to meet their full potential.[11]

Women's transitions back to employment were strongly influenced by their educational level and their length of previous work experience, as found in the international research literature (e.g. Blossfeld and Drobnic (eds.), 2001). Lack of educational qualifications represented a significant barrier to re-entering employment, particularly full-time employment. This is likely to reflect two processes, first an inability to secure a worthwhile wage, and second, a miss-match between skills levels and job opportunities. The greater probability of re-entry to work (especially full-time work) among better educated women is consistent with British and Dutch research (Macran *et al*., 1996; McCulloch and Dex, 2001; Wetzels and Tijdens, 2002). The British studies suggest that this trend is leading to a growing polarisation among British women around childbearing. Our data contain information on recent transitions only, so we cannot evaluate changes over cohorts, nevertheless, the tendency for better educated women to make faster returns and to enter full-time employment is likely to consolidate their occupational and earning advantage compared to other returners.

It is a matter of concern that those with fewest qualifications are least likely to enter education, training or employment schemes, given that these are the group most likely to need such support. This may reflect the formal education requirements that operate for many education programmes and training schemes. Even some of the foundation level Return to Work schemes run by FÁS imposed minimum education requirements (Russell *et al*., 2002). Improved access to government training programmes for returners, especially those with greatest training needs, is essential to prevent occupational downgrading and concentration in low paid unskilled jobs. The pilot Gateway

[11] For a more detailed discussion of the policy implication of the research findings see Russell *et al*. (2002).

for Women programme recently implemented by FÁS is a step in the right direction.

Finally on the demand side, living outside a city reduced the chances of re-entering part-time employment, which suggests that there is a lack of flexible job opportunities for women in rural areas and smaller towns. The availability of flexible working hours remains an important issue for women returners especially those with childcare or elder-care responsibilities. Therefore the occupational distribution of part-time work and the conditions prevailing in these jobs are crucial for the employment prospects of returners and remain important subjects for further research.

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## APPENDIX

Table A.1: *Household and Individual Response Details, Living in Ireland Surveys 1994-1999*

| | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Households* | | | | | | |
| Completed | | | | | | |
| Households | 4,048 | 3,584 | 3,174 | 2,945 | 2,729 | 2,378 |
| Non-Response | 3,038 | 794 | 624 | 390 | 391 | 464 |
| Non-Sample | 166 | 98 | 125 | 119 | 96 | 83 |
| Total Households | 7,252 | 4,476 | 3,923 | 3,454 | 3,216 | 2,925 |
| Household | | | | | | |
| Response Rate | 57% | 82% | 84% | 88% | 87% | 84% |
| *Individuals* | | | | | | |
| N. in Completed | | | | | | |
| Households | 14,585 | 12,649 | 10,939 | 10,006 | 9,045 | 7,721 |
| Eligible for | | | | | | |
| interview* | 10,418 | 9,048 | 7,902 | 7,255 | 6,620 | 5,719 |
| Completed | | | | | | |
| Interviews | 9,904 | 8,531 | 7,488 | 6,868 | 6,321 | 5,451 |
| (% Completed) | 95% | 94% | 95% | 95% | 96% | 95% |

*Aged 17 and over.

Table A2: *Descriptive Statistics for Variables in Multinomial Logit Models*

| | Frequency | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Number* | *%* |
| At Work | 456 | 7.8 |
| Education/Training/Employment Scheme | 96 | 1.6 |
| Non-employed | 5,331 | 90.6 |
| Part-time employed | 114 | 1.9 |
| Full-time employed | 330 | 5.6 |
| Age < 25 | 178 | 3.0 |
| Age 25-34 | 857 | 14.6 |
| Age 35-44 | 1,527 | 26.0 |
| Age 45-54 | 1,648 | 28.0 |
| Age 55+ | 1,673 | 28.4 |
| No Qualification | 2,531 | 43.0 |
| Junior Certificate | 1,565 | 26.6 |
| Leaving Certificate | 1,496 | 25.4 |
| Tertiary | 291 | 4.9 |
| Education/Training last 12 months | 201 | 3.4 |
| Married/with Partner | 5,075 | 86.3 |
| Separated/Divorced/Widowed | 507 | 8.6 |
| Never Married | 301 | 5.1 |
| Partner Working | 3,353 | 57.0 |
| No children under 12 yrs of age | 3,216 | 54.7 |
| Youngest child under 5 yrs | 1,352 | 23.0 |
| Youngest child 5-12 yrs | 1,315 | 22.4 |
| Caring for relative or other | 725 | 12.3 |
| Ever worked | 5,089 | 86.5 |
| Seeking work | 332 | 5.6 |
| < 2 years out of labour market | 459 | 7.8 |
| 2-5 years out of labour market | 644 | 10.9 |
| 5-10 years out of labour market | 784 | 13.3 |
| 10-15 years out of labour market | 731 | 12.4 |
| 15-20 years out of labour market | 703 | 11.9 |
| >20 years out of labour market | 2,562 | 43.5 |
| No social welfare benefits | 4,537 | 77.1 |
| Unemployment | 189 | 3.2 |
| Sickness/Disability | 219 | 3.7 |
| Lone Parent | 392 | 6.7 |
| Other | 546 | 9.3 |
| City resident | 1,842 | 31.3 |
| 1994 | 1,425 | 24.2 |
| 1995 | 1,409 | 24.0 |
| 1996 | 1,181 | 20.1 |
| 1997 | 1,004 | 17.1 |
| 1998 | 864 | 14.7 |
| Total Valid Cases (person years) | 5,883 | 100.0 |
| | *Mean* | *Std. Dev.* |
| Years working (as % of current since age 10) | 25.7 | 17.9 |